'Trusty and Well Beloved'

FILE COPY

Privately Printed

1915

5a

141

FILE COPY

'Trusty and Well Beloved'

'Trusty and Well Beloved'

The Little Record of Arthur Oscar Hornung

Second Lieutenant
3rd ⟨attached 2nd⟩
Essex Regiment

E. W. H.

Privately Printed

1915

'TRUSTY AND WELL BELOVED'

I

It was the Essex Regiment because Oscar happened to be reading history in Essex when war broke out, and from that moment he just lived 'to have a plug at those blighters over the water.' The nearest barracks called him and he went no farther, finding his own way at once into the Third Battalion. His Commission was one of the multitude dated August 15, 1914, but not gazetted for another month, and it was other seven before Oscar 'went with his enthusiasm to France.'[1] His last leave was on his twentieth birthday, and a week later he wrote:[2]

> I am waiting to go off any night now—I am longing to go—it *is* a chance for us chaps, isn't it? It is the one good thing the war has done—to give public-school fellows a chance—they are the one class who are enjoying themselves in this war.

[1] *Eton College Chronicle*, July 22, 1915.
[2] To his godfather, Arthur Conan Doyle.

At any rate Oscar enjoyed himself, from the very hour of his departure, on an April morning as sunny as his smile, in charge of a draft as delighted as himself. That night they embarked at Southampton, and the Seine was a river of roses in the morning:

> The country on each side of the river is lovely—great woods and ravines with large old Louis XV châteaux perched high among them, and then at the foot of the hills pretty little villages, all looking so much *cleaner* than our English ones! Then again in the villages there are all the inhabitants standing outside their doors waving handkerchiefs and even firing off guns to welcome us as we speed up-river at well over 20 knots. . . . One sporting kid in a village a little way back sang out 'Are we downhearted?' and of course she got back a roar from us 'No!'. . . I have never seen country looking so ripping as this—at *such* a time of year too. . . .
>
> I sailed into Southampton yesterday and got my chaps 50 packets of Peters' chocolate to keep them going in case we run short of Rations—which we may very possibly do. It is glorious this rolling up the Seine to the cheers of the French on both banks and our own men (of all *kinds* of Regiments) singing 'Tipperary' for all they are worth!

At Rouen he continued to enjoy himself, even when censoring letters at a five-hour stretch. 'It is rather fun doing this job up to the 500th letter—then Tommy's hand-writing and "love messages" get a bit wearisome!' But all his life it took a

RBC NeU

great deal to weary Oscar, and at Rouen he found a variety of compensations for the ten days he was kept there with his draft. There were sprees and sight-seeings, now 'in good company,' duly detailed, again on 'a bit of a "Tourist Stunt," all on my only oh"; there was Bon Sécours, followed by 'a whacking big tea at a Patisserie in the town'; the Cloche Horlogue ('the topping big clock half way along the street of that name which leads to the Cathedral'—itself 'a topping one'); also 'a splendid little Restaurant we have discovered,' and a certain 'great dinner' which 'started on oysters and finished on Crème de Menthe,' not to add 'a priceless Music Hall —awful *rot* but very funny.' As a last resort there was the Divisional Mess, with its Irish doctor ('entertains us a bit!'), its gramophone, its 'priceless birds' with single eye-glasses ('so the whole place twinkles like stars, on a moonlight night!') and a friend old or new at every turn.

I told you I had met Jack Power—well, on Thursday we visited the Cathedral together and climbed the steeple, from the top of which we got a splendid view of the city. Jack is mad keen on bells, so we had a good look at the old bell at the top of the Cathedral. Then yesterday we met again, and visited the Church of St. Ouen—have you ever seen it? It is a magnificient church—one of the finest churches which is not a Cathedral in the world, I should think. Jack Power

used to be a 'Church-crank' I remember, so he is an excellent fellow for this kind of thing! He is only just fit, having been in hospital for weeks after coming back from the front unfit.

His great new friend was young Willoughby Rooke, like himself an only son, his own age yet a veteran of Mons, severely wounded in the winter and now on his way back to the trenches. Somebody had brought them together as 'mad fishermen'; but they found they had other enthusiasms and some friends in common, to one of whom they wrote of each other, besides themselves exchanging letters at the front. Through them their respective people made friends in London; and long after the light of each home had gone out, a film from Oscar's camera, left behind at Rouen, produced an excellent likeness of 'Rookie,' laughing, with the base camp for background.[1]

In the meantime Rouen was 'magnificient' (as that hard-worked word *would* spell itself), but it was not exactly the war, and for all his gaiety Oscar fretted for the front. 'Still in Rouen, worse luck!' would come first, like the bad news he really deemed it for all concerned: 'It is pretty sickening for you not knowing *when* I am going up—but it will be one

[1] Lieutenant C. D. W. Rooke, 1st Cameronians, was killed in action on June 19.

of these days.' 'It is the absolute edge being kept here like this!' 'All very well this slacking round here . . . so long as the *men* aren't sent up ahead of me I don't mind so much—that would be too sickening.' The men—his men—are the child's children all this time: 'I have 109 Essex under me—a fine crowd,' says one letter; and another, 'The Essex have the best reputation for good conduct here of the whole division. They are a very good lot, this draft of mine'; and again, 'My men are behaving admirably—and the Adjutant told (Capt:) Mullock yesterday that the Essex gave less trouble than *any other* Regiment—in the whole DIVISION, mark you!!' And for the last time: 'I haven't had a single prisoner to bring before the Adjutant—and we have been here 10 days—a jolly good record—what? The Essex have wrought their Regimental crest in broken glass on some sand at the end of their lines—it is a beautiful piece of work—and they got leave to have it photographed yesterday—I will send you a print if I can get one. This sort of thing makes them take no end of pride in themselves.' And the same night 'an order came down that every available officer and man should proceed to the front,' whereat Oscar exulted with a 'Hoch! the Kaiser!! "Always merry and bright!"' and a final scribble as he

entrained in charge of his Brigade details: 'This is glorious—my men are *so* cheery—talk about the right spirit—they *have* got it and no mistake!! Marched through Rouen—2000 of us with bag-pipes playing. Love to you all. Oscar.'

The immediate sequel 'just about put the asphyxiating lid on'; it was also 'the l-i-m-i-t,' and everything else that Oscar could lay his pen to; but some foul whiff had caught him by the throat and, within sound of the firing-line, flung him straight into No. 3 General Hospital, Le Tréport, with a temperature and 'throat as thick as camp water and rasping as a German bayonet. . . . If only it had been a nice little "dum-dum" I should have felt on an equal footing with these other poor chaps—instead of squatting there in the hospital train opposite them as untouched as a new inner tube!' It was all the more tantalising because nobody knew better than Oscar that he was 'missing no end of a scrap,' as he lay between unforeseen sheets, in the hands of 'topping Sisters' (God bless them!) who gave him in spite of everything 'a fine old time.'

I have just been writing some Rhymes of mine into one of the Sisters' books—in return for her lending me some Kipling books! I get on like a house on fire with these 'sisters.' The 'night sister' is my great pal. We have great talks when she comes round of nights.

It was Rouen over again, without the revels or the sights: nothing for it but to make the best of several more days' unwelcome grace. This Oscar did by sleeping prodigiously while he could, reading and writing to his heart's content, and presently exploring the green peace of the surrounding country. His love of Nature, always intense, was indeed never more demonstrative than towards the end of this involuntary rest, when they let him roam as he liked but would not pass him for the front. The weather was 'divine'; more than once he took in fresh stores of sleep 'under the blue sky and boiling sun' (the last thing a normal Oscar would have done by day); finally, he heard of some fishing at 'a charming little village' near by, procured cheap tackle and 'had a perfectly heavenly time there,' though not without martial qualms as to the propriety of the proceeding. Twice or thrice he went, catching nothing for his sins, till at last 'the angelic French people insisted on my taking a trout, which they had caught themselves that morning, and exhibiting it at the village inn as *my* catch! They were awfully tickled.' He was not, however, the only sinner; at least one C.O. kept him in countenance ('the old boy quite keen—had sent to good old Hardy's especially for a new rod!!'). Yet 'it doesn't look well,

and 'it seems all wrong,' and we were not to 'say anything of this to *other* people.'

This afternoon [his last] I and a Gordon Highlander took a taxi down to Criel—where I spent 3 hrs. (glorious) fishing—weather more heavenly than ever —no fish—but one of the most delightful afternoons I have ever spent. Oh! it was heavenly down there! I have got the address for future occasions!!

We had a top-hole drink of cider—real home-made stuff—at the local inn by the river—then had a big tea on the way back. . . .

This week will be a very happy one to look back on in one way.

It still is—to us.

II

ALL the actual warfare he had seen as yet was a shower of shell ('coming in one after the other, like cocoa-nuts on Epsom Race Course') in a certain market-place at the end of April. Three weeks later he found the same thing happening at the same place, and put it in his letter with the same gusto:

> What Ho! They are starting their evening's shelling of ——— just behind us. Their 15-in. come with a noise just like an express train—and they start on us every evening this way about 7 P.M., just by way of a little diversion after the day's labours! 'Boom /r-r-r-r-r-z-z-z-z-z/ *splosh!*'—there they go. And all this goes on whilst the birds sing, cows moo—pigs grunt—and all the other 'beasties' of a farm-yard perform—that is the striking feature of it all, to me anyway.

The battalion was in billets after a very strenuous time. 'Nearly all the old crowd of officers are away wounded or worse,' as Oscar put it. His captain, his platoon sergeant, and his servant had all been severely wounded; a second-lieutenant

of his own standing had succeeded to the command of B Company, and Oscar realised what he had missed. 'Oh! how I wish I had been in that scrap!' he wrote, but added: 'Tomorrow I shall have my "blooding—"' and at the thought: 'I'm as happy as a lark and a humming-bird rolled in one.'

Nearly all the rest is in the following letters and bits of letters, most of them written in the trenches under fire, those to us being numbered in the order of their arrival from the time he left.

(23)

The Trenches, 2/Essex Reg.
1.30 P.M. May 23, '15. Sunday.

MY DEAREST MUMMY & DADDY,—Well—here we are in the trenches—half-made and generally in a rotten condition. The Regiment that was here before us seems to have done nothing at all, except leave a mess of jam-pots etc.

We marched up here last night during a violent thunderstorm—I've never experienced one like it—pouring rain and fork-lightning which lit up the whole front. My word, but I've been 'blooded' alright! There was a lot of confusion in the trenches which resulted in the Germans waking us up a bit. We—that is me and my Platoon—are at present in the 2d line of trenches supporting another Coy in the 1st line. The distance between us is about 250–300 yards—and then another 400 to the German line. During the night one could walk about in comparative safety outside the trenches—but it was exciting work—as I

had to supply the Coy: in front with barb-wire and sandbags—1300 sand-bags—under a cross-fire from those wretched snipers whom they employ so much. There is an old 'Estaminet' up in front (200 yards off), to which we have to get up these things. There we leave them to be called for by the others. The Germans have a nasty trick of sending up coloured lights—very brilliant—which reveal our whole position. When we got up there at 1 A.M. this morning—I and 6 or 7 men—they got a bead on us, and as they have a perfect range drawn on the Estaminet things were lively. I may now be more cheerful and say we have had no one touched as yet—but these men are magnificient—they don't care a —— for shells or anything—they scuttled about like rabbits all night—digging bomb-proof shelters etc. But those infernal lights gave the whole position away more than once. Of course, sleep is out of the question in this sort of game—but I feel as fit as anything—though I have never had such a trying ½ hr in my life as just before lunch-time when some asses on the left of the platoon showed themselves and one of their guns got at us—My aunt! but I *was* in a funk! How they never actually hit us I can't imagine. Shrapnel in front and behind—but no one was hit. The worst of these shells is that you hear the beastly things coming directly after they leave the gun—*whistling* like a train (Our own are doing so at this moment over our heads)—so the betting is then—where is it going to land! I am absolutely cut off from the other Companies as there is no telephone here—so have to work entirely on my own—and have a look round directly it becomes dark.——and the other two platoons seem to have vanished off the face of the earth—I suppose they are somewhere. I hope so.[1]

[1] Presently he went to see—with a result described in his letter to Mr. de Havilland, p. 46.

Yesterday we marched off at 9.30 A.M. and went to Divisional H.Q's where we remained until it was time to move off in here at dark. Div: H.Q's are situated in a glorious old château (which has escaped injury altogether) in a park which looks perfect in this month and in this weather.

6 P.M. now—they are shelling Ypres right over our heads—we call these 15-in. shells the 'Wipers expresses'—'Here comes the 6 P.M. express' with a hum like an engine exactly.

There is a farm house—quite demolished—just at the end of my trench and one has to run the gauntlet to get there across the road and get bricks, wood etc: for the trench. You may say 'where am I sitting writing this?' Well, I am in an improvised 'dug out' 6 ft. long by 2 ft. broad—covered over with corrugated-iron. Very muddy and all that—but still a shelter.

All night I am working at digging the trenches and 'dug outs'—seeing to the barbed-wire in front of us—and getting provisions from the H.Q's behind our line. In fact we get everything ready at night—either for an attack in the morning or protection from shell and rifle fire during the day. We get more shelled in the 2nd line than the 1st—so that we should not send help up to the 1st line.

Of course, in case the 1st line of trenches are stormed or 'gassed,' I act entirely on my own in sending up assistance to them. There is no evidence of their having a heavy time in front at present though. We have an infernal sniper who has got behind our lines and is firing down the trench from one end—we shall have to fix him somehow, I'm thinking.

It is a perfectly heavenly evening—birds singing and country looking pretty in spite of the ruins with which it is dotted. The whole thing seems more absurd

and unreal than ever to me now that I am in the thick of it. To think that this terrific din is going on incessantly down 400 miles of line is extraordinary.

My word—my dear Mummy—you should see me *now*—my coat and breeches ! ! After splashing about on all fours round the country-side last night I am some sight ! The left knee of my bags is ripped across and I am *coated* with clay. Once we get these trenches fixed up—with dug-outs etc : the shelling won't be so bad and we shall be a good deal more comfortable.

Well, my dears, I am longing for a letter—but am as happy as a lark—because I know that although this is hard to stick at first—there are millions of others sticking it too—and I can only liken it to ' putting your left leg to the ball ' at cricket, as W. H. C. used to say.

Write as much as possible—Love to all.

Ever yr own loving son,

OSCAR.

(This will go up tonight by transport—and I hope reach you soon.)

(24)

2 P.M. May 25, '15.

MY DEAREST MUMMY & DADDY,—Just got your letter—and cannot tell you how pleased I was to get it. Things have been pretty fast and furious since I wrote night before last. Yesterday morning, having been working all night I was just trying to get some sleep in a new dug-out which I had had built, when there was a shout of ' The Gas, Sir ! ' Out I bounced and was immediately aware of this Chlorine ' muckins ' coming up the hill. It was just getting dawn and so I knew, as we all knew, that there was going to be an attack—and my aunt—it *was* an attack. For 2 hrs solid the

Germans rained every calibre of shell on us in our Reserve Trenches whilst we were also struggling with the Gas. I don't know what happened to the Platoon during that time—except that several swines—my servant for one—took panic and ran. Personally I knelt down behind a parapet and prayed. However, the Gas wasn't a success for the Germans for it soon blew off. They reckoned, of course, that whilst they attacked the first line trenches where A, C, D Companies were, they could make things so hot for us in Reserve (200 yards back) that we couldn't send help along. However, about 4.15 A.M. I managed to collect the remnants of my Platoon and make a bid for the first line trenches —not by charging across the intervening ground which would have wiped us out—but by crawling along a very muddy communication trench which connected the French line with us. This we succeeded in doing without a casualty—and we then joined D Company in the 1st line trenches. From that time onwards a very fierce artillery battle raged until the evening—and the Germans made repeated attacks from 400 yards off—each time being knocked back into their trenches like a rabbit down a hole. Then, last night, when we heard that the Germans had taken 2 trenches on our left and when we expected we should make a counter-attack—orders came that we should retire right back to the very incomplete trenches in which we are now. We marched back here, then, during the night—dug ourselves in—and are now awaiting developments under a perfectly tropical sun and sky—*too* hot almost. It *was* sickening having to retire like that—for we had done magnificiently all day—A & C Companies having been almost wiped out by the German shell fire. They are absolute fiends at that.

Anyhow—here we are always merry and bright in our new position, none of us having had any

sleep for 3½ days! I never could have believed that our men could stick things like they have these 3 days—they are magnificient—no other word for them. Those fellows who deserted yesterday will probably be shot. I would have shot them myself, and been perfectly justified, if I hadn't been doubled up with the Gas.

If we have to reinforce the first line, if it gets hit badly again, the Essex will pull things together—not 'alf!

For other light on what is happening here you must read the papers, if they have anything authentic. We are just a little to the left of where I told you in one of my letters before from hospital. We heard of Italy declaring war last night. Good work! I am sorry about Raffles—but it is getting on now, isn't it?—near the end of May!

I am so glad you liked Rooke's mamma. I am afraid I don't know about Carolyn—I think he has got people in town—but I will let you know if I find out when things are quieter here! At the moment of writing there are shells whizzing all over the place—'Little Willies' we call their shrapnel shells!

I haven't seen any papers for days—but we shall have a rest some time—when this thing is over.

Ever so much love—I am as fit as anything—in spite of their gases.

Ever yr loving son,

OSCAR.

I will write *whenever* possible. I very nearly lost all my kit last night—so you must expect 'gaps' sometimes. But a 2 day Gap at the most—I promise you.

You should see the mess I'm in after these 4 days!!

(24A)

May 26, '15. 6 P.M.

A quiet day to-day after our adventurous times lately—weather still lovely—quite tropical heat in fact. The trench we are in now is in a rotten state—no dug-outs or anything—however the Essex are always given the 'dirty work' so to speak, and we have already been complimented on our fighting by the General Staff.

I have been having a good look at the German trenches through Uncle Charlie's glasses to-day—They are digging themselves in like fiends—and have dressed themselves in khaki!

We have just this moment been firing on a German aeroplane which flew over our lines, but with no result.

I haven't had my boots etc: off since we came up—and don't expect I shall until we return to billets!

(25)

May 27, '15. 6 P.M.

MY DEAREST MUMMY & DADDY,—Thanks for your ripping letter again last night. We get the letters here by the ration carts which come up at night-time, so the actual post comes in at about midnight. I read yours this morning at 2 A.M. when we were 'standing to' in the grey light of dawn waiting a possible German attack, which is in all cases preceded by Gas here. You are splendid about everything—getting a Respirator and all that—of course we are all dealt out special ones here, which, if properly adapted, the Gas has absolutely no effect on. To-day has again been quite calm—just the usual exchange of artillery-fire and rifle-fire. This is the programme of the day at present here: Work all night at strengthening the

position (sand-bags etc :)—barb-wire—and getting in provisions, water—etc. under cover of darkness. Day-time, 2 A.M. (dawn about) we stand to arms for ½ hr whilst the listening posts (consisting of 3 men and a N.C.O.) are brought in. These last are simply what they imply—i.e. men who lie down and keep their ears and eyes open for any movement on our front—posted well out in front of our trenches. If an attack is to be made it is almost certain to come off then—like the other day. From then till dark (about 8.30 P.M.) we lie very low and *sleep* as much as possible. This last is not always very easy—and depends entirely on (1) the condition of the trench, (2) the activity of the German artillery—! I have slept about 6 hrs since we came in, I should think. You can imagine that one gets very fat, sleepy and dirty under these conditions. Meals? Well—'rations' consist of bully-beef (which will go at a German's head before I eat it)—cheese—jam—and bacon—tea and sugar. The last three ingredients (good word!) I find most suitable.—'Am I *late* for meals?' Well—there is no fixed time—and one simply seizes a bite when one can. The men make small fires in the corners of the trenches and are very good at doing my bacon and tea (without milk!) for me, when things are quiet. These trenches are, you must understand, still in the most elementary condition—and by the time we have made them comfortable we shall probably be leaving for somewhere else in the line. They always seem to give the Essex the dirty work to do—and *that* is because they do it so well. I want you to have an idea of things—now the country is flat—you know that—and we face slightly up hill—with the German trenches about 550 yards away. Between the two positions are several farmhouses—in ruins—which provide cover for German snipers sometimes. These are shelled continuously—as they are used by

both sides for distinguishing marks to get a range off. The rest is green country—hedges and everything as it might be found on the Sussex downs. Even *cows* are wandering about just behind the trench here—and we are wondering how to get rid of them! Of course you mustn't imagine a straight line—the firing lines of both forces curve all over the place—so that at some points it is very hard to distinguish between them. There is a small stream running between the lines, from which we get some of our water, and in the evening sometimes for 2 or 3 minutes the guns will stop and it will be quiet and country-like except for the ominous ruins dotting the landscape and the flames of —— in the background—where some place has caught alight.

There is very little actually to do in the trenches, except sit tight and see that the men do so also. I can't be bothered to *wash* or anything like that—though I *did* have a shave the other day for a wonder! You should see my puttees! and my 'bags' are torn to ribbons round the knee——I have *just* heard a typical type of Tommy 'wit' remark 'Fritz is quiet!' I have Tommy all round and behind me here—lying in all attitudes in a trench that is not more than 2 ft. wide anywhere! Again—this very moment at a bullet whizzing over I hear 'Ah! Fritz!!' Men with such spirit in them as this will go through H—— and come out the other side *com*fortably! This game of lying low, doubled up in an open trench reminds me so much of Kipling's

> 'Long afternoons of lyin' still
> and 'earin', as you lay,
> the bullets swish from 'ill to 'ill
> like Scythes among the 'ay.'

—out of 'Piet'—I think. . . .

Daddy—your letters are absolute life to me out here. I want to say this, as I want you and Mummy to understand what it feels like to get a letter like I did this morning—or rather last night—just when another day was coming on—it is like whisky to a Scotsman—much more, because it lasts ! ! I am going to write *every* day if I possibly can—just a break here and there you must expect. I am writing no other letters at present, and have only had two from anyone else but you—but I really don't require anything but yours—just a line from either of you. I am feeling as fit as anything—teeth and everything splendid. I'm coated with dirt, but what does that matter ? You can look like a scarecrow here for all anyone cares ! Things are very quiet this evening—and I think something big must be going on further down the line. You *did* get that letter which I sent from hospital with the [*Daily Mail*] *map* in it—didn't you ? Because that shows you exactly where I am without my saying anything here. The papers should tell you the rest.

Well—toodle-oo—do write, won't you—it is just like as if one was at Eton—letters etc : ! Remember 'always merry and bright ! '

Much love to you both—and G.M.[1]

Ever yr own loving son,

OSCAR.

(26)

May 28th, '15. 5 P.M.

. . . Another quiet day to-day, and tonight we go into reserve trenches—which is very tame—and from there probably to billets for rest after about 4 days—so have no anxiety about me, my dears, for another 8 days at least. . . . Well—we both spent

[1] = 'Grandmamma.'

our Whit Monday as circumstances permitted, didn't we? I had the most thrilling day of my life, anyhow, and the moonlight night wasn't quite like Oxshott Woods! . . . I am hearing priceless things whilst I write: such as these: 'All change here for Liverpool Street' as the guards are being relieved: and 'You want a shave, Bill—*out*side and you'll get a —— close one!'

. . . This is a wretchedly written epistle, but you must remember that I am sitting in a very cramped position in my temporary dug-out—consisting of a niche in the trench, 6 ft. long by 2 ft. wide! I believe I told you this before, but there is nothing like rubbing it in! I got quite a sleep last night, turning in here about 12.30 A.M. and sleeping till 4 A.M.—best I've had so far.

The routine is always—for both sides—work by night—sniping and sleep by day. Now there is just desultory rifle-fire going on—perfectly safe as long as you keep down. We have had no more casualties since Monday's affray.

. . . My platoon sergeant is a fine chap . . . a sound fellow. Unshaven for 1 week he looks just like an old pirate with one of those 'Swiss Caps' on his head.

(27)

May 30th, '15. 7 P.M.

MY DEAREST MUMMY & DADDY,—Got *both* papers last night and your ripping letter when I returned from a tedious digging expedition just in front of the enemy lines—most welcome they were! Now I hope all letters and parcels will behave themselves, though I must admit none of the parcels have arrived as yet. I hope for a different discovery when we return to 'billets' however, which will probably be tomorrow or

next day. I am out of the trenches now and on the bonny banks of a Canal 2 miles back from the firing-line—In *Reserve,* in fact. We left the trenches Friday night—had a quiet day here yesterday, in which I was able to get a shave and wash—and last night I had to go with the aforementioned digging-party right in front of our lines, and fill up some trenches which *a* regiment evacuated the other day in face of the Germans. This was to prevent them getting them for their own use. It is weird work—standing out there between the two firing-lines in the semi-darkness—with *flares* (which the Germans send up continuously all night) showing one up plainly, as they show everything else up in the vicinity. They use fire-works for these, of course. There was a big attack going on made by the French on our left, so all was quiet in our actual area, though you never know when the enemy aren't going to hear the sound of the shovels and open fire. Then the moon shining over all makes the gutted, stark farm-houses scattered over the fields stand out grotesquely—for all the world as if you were standing at the Coliseum end of the Forum in Rome and looking into it. You know the lines in which 'Plains which the moonlight turns to sea' comes? I can't find a better line to describe the appearance of this perfectly level battlefield stretching for miles on either side—and the dig-dig-dig—with an occasional whistle which has to be smothered. What a chance for a budding Kipling!

It was great work getting those papers last night —*so* quickly—That is a top-hole wheeze in Punch—there is also a good parody (is that the right word?) on H. Belloc.

Thanks so much for the Fishing cutting—the Canal here seems full of some kind of fish, though *I* have not tried my hand at them. Excellent work re Khaki Breeches. I am in need of a 2nd pair badly now

—Thoughtful Mummy! I have discovered a weird 'bloke' for a servant—His name is Crump—surely you can work a wheeze with that kick-off? ? He has a wonderful knack of getting things to eat—he has bought eggs, butter, and milk from the town here (you should be able to guess what town) and is altogether a useful one, I'm thinking!

I have a priceless 'booby' to live in here. You have to crawl in on your 'innards' but when you get there it is *very* cosy with straw to lie on. All the men have boobies to live in too—funny little holes in the ground—all round my *big* hole—for all the world like a rabbit-warren!

Our C.O.—Jones—has been promoted Major—he is a jolly good soldier too.

It is another heavenly evening, and with the ruins of —— against the sky—what a picture—by heavens! —what wonderful sights there are to see here if one keeps one's eyes open—sights which *can't* have ever been much surpassed in any war before. There! they are shelling the town now—great 12 in: shells in the middle of it—and then at night a dull glow will gradually appear in the sky, which will redden and spread as more shells are poured in. Mind you I am in the outskirts of this place myself at this moment—so I am writing with the very thing before me.

Of course, people will come in their thousands to see these historic places in a year or more's time—but what a sight to see *before* the common crowd can!! No one in the world but one or two w: correspondents and a few Regiments like my own can see this and other wonderful sights up here. For instance—the very fields in front of the trenches we have been occupying have been the scene of the most famous engagements of the war so far as we are concerned—how much more I could 'gas'—but won't, because

I shall be letting some cats out! I have *got* the best part of a 6 in: German shell which exploded just outside my 'booby' last night whilst I was away—my servant had a near escape. It is beastly heavy, but I will hang onto it somehow. I am not allowed to send it home to you unfortunately.

Well—I love your letters—write away when you have time—everything merry and bright as ever.

Love to G.M.

Ever your own loving son,

OSCAR.

N.B.

When are you off to Masongill—I want to know.

To Hugh de Havilland, his Eton Tutor.

N.B. Couldn't you somehow concoct a new 'stink' for us to apply v: the Germans here? You have the laboratories of Eton to work in and it might send us through to the Rhine! Why not all the Science masters put their heads together and make a real good-un—a corker!

I can introduce the new invention to the Brigadier and be promoted on the spot!

A. O. H.

(30)

June 2, '15. 6.15 P.M.

Here we are again in billets and at the same farm-house as we were at before. This is very convenient, as we know our way about the place—the same squalling kids, etc.! . . .

Another heavenly day of sunshine—the country here looks more ripping than ever—and it is a glorious *slack* here after our ten days in the trenches. . . .

It seems queer to be back here again—in the comparative quiet of the country. We came here by a night-march last night—arriving 2 A.M. this morning. I slept in my barn again—topping to get out of one's clothes for a change—I shall have a bath tomorrow!

(33)

June 5, '15. Saturday, 5 P.M.

We go up to the trenches again tomorrow (Sunday) stopping for the afternoon on the way at the good old château—much like the one Uncle Innes is billeted at I fancy.

Well, the inspection went off alright today—It was the General commanding the 2nd Army Corps (which we are in) who inspected us—and he came up to me and shook me by the hand and congratulated me on having the best platoon in the Company—Thereupon a man in the front rank fell almost into his arms—fainting—and had to be assisted off. The General, however, was a sportsman and took no heed of the occurrence—I was furious, but it was distinctly funny otherwise. As for the hand-shake—I certainly shan't wash my right fist till I come out from the trenches again after that!

Before leaving the old man (extraordinarily young for his post really) said a few kind words to the officers and left us all feeling we could take on old man Kluck himself!

(35)

June 8, '15.

. . . Funny kind of day today—as quiet as the grave—hardly a shot fired this afternoon—our friend Fritz is never so crafty as when he is quiet—always up

to some dirty game or other—so we expect some jollification soon !

There was a thunderstorm this afternoon which cleared the air a bit—it has been devilish hot—' where the 'eat would make your bloomin' eyebrows crawl ' our friend has it ! The flies are awful now—suddenly come on—send me some of that ' Anti-Midge ' stuff which *Hardy's* sell—My face is like St. Andrew's golf course now—and *lots* of bunkers at that ! . . .

. . . Had a royal lunch today—potted meat and bread and butter—coffee (j : good) and cream—and tinned peaches and cream ! I wish we had some more of the latter—just the thing in this crawling heat. We had my ' Barrack Room Ballads ' out this afternoon and Monypenny pored over them awhile.

My servant Crump is an extraordinary fellow—I am told he was educated at Charterhouse and enlisted at the beginning of the war !

(36)

June 9, '15. 10 P.M.

My dearest Mummy and Daddy,—No post last night so I daresay I shall get something tonight.

Another quiet day today—rained a bit this evening. Crump got me some fresh eggs and milk from a neighbouring farm behind the Canal—priceless servant, what ? The *flies* are awful during the day here now—' Muscatol ' quickly please ! Tomorrow night we go into the front line trenches which are barely 70 yards from our friends—There are *no* trenches to speak of and we are fired on from every quarter of the globe —but *that* is why they are sending the *Essex* there—remember ! Tonight we are working away at the trench just in front of us—the men are working splendidly —and the whole place is swimming with *mud* and water already !

. . . Monypenny and I and de la Mare lay and basked all day in our shirts drinking hot tea and cursing at the flies. This evening I had my Section Commanders up (remember—4 Sections—about 10 men—to a Platoon) and told them a few things. It is by cursing the N.C.O's that one gets any efficiency out of the men—It is just like H. de H.'s at Eton over again—House didn't swing together if the younger members of 'Debate' didn't control their juniors —who *were friends of theirs*.—So the young N.C.O. finds it hard to drop on the men from whom he has just been raised in rank—and 'the backbone of the Army is the non-commissioned man.' R. K.

Thanks to my worthy Sergeant Clarke—in charge of Platoon—my men are learning discipline and how to keep their heads—by *degrees*—but it is very hard work, as they are really all *very young* and inexperienced —straight from the home, so to speak—I am not *quite* sure how they would do if it was a case of 'no one cares to face 'em but every beggar must'—(R. K.)—however, as I told my Corporals tonight, we shall see their worth sooner or later. Peake was wounded last night—only slightly in the arm—will be back soon, in fact. I have got some glorious G: shells here—but don't know how I could ever get them on to the mantelshelf in the Study ! ! Some more of that *café au lait*, please, and condensed milk and *Menier* Chocolate—keep you busy !

Well—I must go out again and have a look round —we shall have a great time in this trench out in front —it is in a *swamp* and there are fifty Canadians in the Parapet !

Toodle-oo !

Much love to you both and everyone else at No. 7.

I so love your letters—both of you.

'Bon Soir !'

Your loving son,

OSCAR.

(37)

June 10th, 1915.

My dearest Mummy & Daddy,—No letter last night, but I expect something tonight—perhaps the bed! Today has been again uneventful and we go into the new trenches at 9.30 tonight. It is one mass of mud here now but will soon dry up with the sun. We shall be *six* days in the new trenches, and then probably straight back to billets. What was my surprise today but to see Monypenny suddenly open a ½ bottle of champagne! He had been given it down at Battalion Headquarters—a present from the C.O.!

Programme today has been 2 A.M.—flop into dug-out dog-tired and very sick at getting no letters by our midnight mail (?)—2 A.M.–3 A.M. 'stand to arms'—i.e. all respirators ready for instant use and rifles clean etc. whilst a mist slowly lifts from the dewy ground in front and the enemies' trenches become gradually visible. —Directly they are well in sight the men are allowed to lie down and sleep—all except the sentries. 9.30 A.M. awoke in frowsy, damp booby and had some breakfast made by the redoutable Crump. 10 A.M. had a look round the platoon: saw rifles were clean etc: 10 A.M. onwards slept—or rather tried to, flies awful! Later in the morning Monypenny showed us where we were going tonight and what we should have to do there—then nothing more till tonight—just drowse and curse at the wet and the flies and read 'Michael Strogoff' —also listen to the Germans shelling buildings on our right and left and wondering for how long he is going to leave us alone!

Well—must stop now. I do hope these letters are reaching you—and not all in *one* batch! I still want something—and that is a *revolver holster* to fit that Smith Wesson revolver we bought together!

Much love to you all—You will now have an idea of what I am up to during the day—at night we simply *work* at sandbags and barbed-wire etc : so as to protect ourselves by day.

A rotten letter !

Ever your own loving son,

OSCAR.

(39)

Saturday, June 12th, '15. 6.45 P.M.

. . . We have really 'upholstered' this 'booby' of ours very smartly—We have a table and 2 chairs (ammunition boxes) and have adorned the walls with pictures (of actresses) out of a Magazine and the photo of a Frenchman's ma taken out of a rubbish-heap behind ! The whole concern is only about 8 feet by 6 in dimension and de la Mare—myself—and my most worthy Crump live in it. . . . We sent Crump off on an expedition for *food* the other day and he was clever enough to buy us 18 eggs, 2 bottles Vin Ordinaire, 2 lbs butter, 3 loaves bread, and a bottle of milk—and bring all these up through miles of communication trench without breaking an h'egg ! Imagine him slushing through mud holding the bundle of eggs before him ! . . .

This is really very cosy—and if undisturbed by our friends 150 yards off will continue to be so. We're going to ask for leave, 'Moneybags' and self—to bomb these blighters out of a small trench which they have jutting from their line—in other words a 'salient' in their line. This will be more to our liking than sitting being shelled, I'm thinking ! After this rain—it will be a 'sticky wicket,' but a slow overhand bowler with a hand-grenade should beat the Teuton Batsman—at any rate the *fielding* will be good—although I shouldn't like to be silly-point ! ; that's my silly point !

(40)

June 14.

For those who can look at this sort of warfare in the right way there are enormous advantages—I feel as if I had lived a century !

(41)

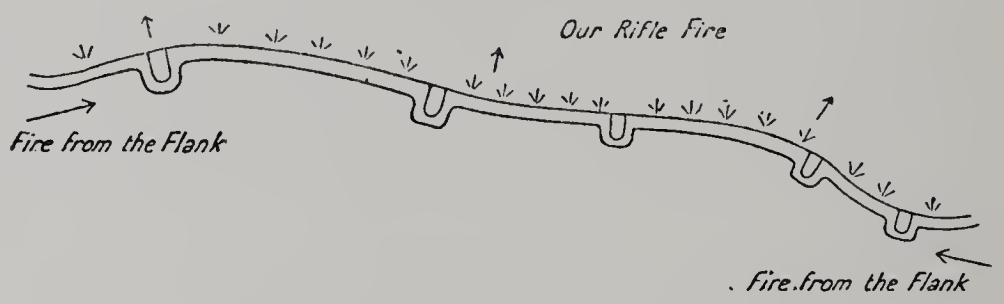
June 14th, 1915. 1 P.M.

My dearest M. & Daddy,—Got the Chronicle, letter and 'Land and Water' this morning—also all those letters which went wrong when I was in hospital ! I had a ripping letter from Auntie also and a note from Daisy—also the fruit etc : from G.M. so I didn't do badly. Amongst the lost letters was one from Shane and his wife ; several from you both, and a note from Rooke. Shane seemed pretty cheery—he wrote from Salisbury. Have you seen anything of him lately ? Well—you all seem to be reading my muckins —the whole contingent at No : 7—the 'droppers in' and car-riders etc : so I will extend my descriptive efforts a bit, for as far as I can see the papers talk a lot of rot and give people a very poor idea of the general doings, round *here* at any rate. Some day I am going to try my hand at a few short stories (shut up laughing !) on the Sniper, the 'Jack Johnson' and several other objects of interest—when I have the energy—which is not often. The programme is eat, sleep, and work, and there is not much energy left for writing, though any amount of time *and* scope. For instance, I simply can't be bothered to write in Pen and ink—this is a very untidy output !

Enough of this : now let me give you an idea of what the French trenches which we are occupying are like.

First there is a barricade of earth thrown up—

about 10 ft. wide by 3 high—the cavity left being the actual trench. Between this mound of earth and the trench is a wall of sand-bags—three to four thick by 10 high. This gives a man 6 ft. of standing room with a stepping stone on which to stand for firing purposes. Behind and jutting out from this parapet are erected what we know as 'traverses,' or thick walls of sandbags 15 ft. long by 12 ft. wide (about) to protect the flanks of the trench; thus:



Behind all are communication trenches, the purpose of which lies in the name and does for 'dug outs' etc:

This is the outline of any trench, German, French or English, so there is no harm in showing you. Now *these* trenches are all broken down and in a filthy mess, and we are building them up as quick as we can. The French seem to have had no idea of trench-work. My platoon occupies about 25 yards of trench, but it is very small—only 32 all told. Night and day we work—only allowing a certain portion to be at work at one time, and having another certain portion told off for sentry duty. I have been studying the German trenches (150 yards off now) this morning with my glasses (Uncle Charlie's) and see they are hard at work on theirs also. And so there you have us—a picture—two parties—150 yards apart—both digging

for all they are worth and picking each other off at every opportunity—both entirely at the mercy of the other's artillery—both having their letters from home and national papers urging them (if anything ever did) to do great things. This strikes me forcibly this morning—quiet for the last hour as your study itself—and *isn't* it an absolutely unique situation ? There are many brave men over yonder just longing for a 'scrap' like we are—perhaps they haven't quite got our spirit, but still your Bosch is no weakling. And this situation exists, with few exceptions (I mean hand to hand struggles) for 400 miles of frontage ! Of course these are all truisms—but—dash it ! do the people in England realize that if that 150 yards was taken and a few more miles were rushed after that by our friends across the way—*anything* might happen. Of course this is all 'supposing'—but—*what* a pity we aren't fighting this war on the borders of Scotland ! No—the Germans will never break our line, but neither have we broken theirs and people seem to think that that is a foregone conclusion. However Italy, as you say, will put matters on a more promising footing.

Last night I had to post a listening-patrol from my platoon out in front. It was a pitch dark night, so I had a roam round (safe as houses at night)—I got quite close to old man Fritz and only retreated quickly because I came across the remains of a struggle between French and German—*not* very enticing. The men I took out with me lay down (they are old hands at the game) close to the ground amongst the *clover*, which abounds here and affords excellent cover—and closer still when they sent their infernal lights up which give everyone away for a long way round. It is exciting, in a mild form, out in front, as the Germans are just over the lip of the hill and can creep up their side and put out their patrols so that you have two little parties

listening for each other's movements at only about 30 yards distance. I thought I had been and gone and done it when I saw something jolly like a man in the grass. It was a dead 'Froggie'—that was all!

Since I talked of its being quiet, the Huns have started their little game (so cheerful for the *bowler!*) of pelting us with trench-mortars—and it is just about time our artillery got onto them. These mortars they bring up into the first line trenches and so range at about 200 yards—imagine the size of the projectile. Now I hope this letter hasn't too much 'frightfulness' in it—It may interest you and any aunts or 'droppers in' there may be!

The C.O. (Jones) is coming along—he is a calm one—one of those trench m's burst just behind him just now: their effect, of course, is very local. Just at the end of my stretch of trench are the old emplacements where the Canadians lost and retook their guns. Truly a historic piece of ground this—This is the very trench from which the French ran when first the Gas was employed—that is why there is such an enormous amount of equipment and hundreds of broken French rifles lying about.—The Germans have been in it *also*, so there will be some pretty times when the *ghosts* of this place have a look in later on! Outside our booby-hutch there is a topping little look-out place from which on sunny mornings I try my luck with a rifle—I made Fritz keep his head down this morning alright!

Ah! the French have got at them with shrapnel—that will help matters—(you must excuse these little side-allusions—a little hard to keep my attention fixed you know!).

Ah! Boom—Boom—Boom—the guns are waking up all along—now things will probably keep alive until sundown when night will come on, each side will send out its listening-posts, there will be a big exchange of

rifle-fire (there always is about 8 P.M.–9 P.M. when we 'stand to'), and another day of this extraordinary existence both sides are leading will be over.

I could rattle on like this for pages—but have run short of paper (send me out a *big block*).

So toodle-oo pip! pip!!

Love to you all.

Ever your own loving son,

OSCAR.

(Letter going to Masongill today).

Another 'scrap of paper' for you to digest!

Rather a droll thing was told me yesterday by one of the Lancashire Fusiliers (our Brigade)—he was taking a wounded Tommy down the communication trenches —shot in the leg—and could only carry him by throwing him across his shoulder—legs dangling in front. During the way down the unfortunate Tommy got another one through the head—and when he got him to the dressing-station he was cursed by the doctor who said he had enough cases to deal with as it was and could do without *dead* men—at which our Lancs hero cried 'The —— liar! he told me he was hit in the leg!'

*Some*body sent me a little book called 'Aunt Sarah and the War' the other day. Many thanks and jolly good—whoever it was!

Send me the 'Times' every now and again—will you?

Must have another 'go' at Fritz—so once more 'So long!'—when I am putting out barbed-wire tonight I shall remember R.K's

> 'I wish me mother could see me now
> with a fence-post under me arm!'

It was with this screed that Oscar enclosed a set of his own verses, about which we had a little corre-

spondence later. They had only been jotted down, he explained, to go into his letter to me, and he would not hear of their emerging anywhere in print. 'Heavens! I can get something better off my chest than that,' he protested, 'if it comes to "type"!' These private pages, however, are barely in that category, and, as even Oscar allowed that his 'doggerel' was 'true to experience,' here those verses are:

'JUNE 13TH, 1915.'

Two long lines of sandbags twisted and interwined,
With a felled tree here and a shell hole there and a 'traverse' undermined;
Fields which are dotted with men, down in the clover green;
A rifle bent and a pouch half spent and a ruin in between:

Scarcely a sound for token of what is taking place,
For hardly a word is spoken and hardly sign of a face.
Sudden—a shot outringing and—arms both backwards thrown,
A curse at his foe outflinging, the Sniper has met his own!

Silence again, and never a sound, but the swish of spades
As each side makes endeavour to work ere daylight fades:
Night, and the cover of darkness screens what the workers make,
And Belgium in her starkness is still as a mountain lake.

And so the day is over—the end as much in doubt—
And Fritz no nearer Dover; and so the papers shout:
'At Przmysl and Epernay heavy battles have been fought,
But (Official) Ypres way there's *nothing* to report!'

This, at any rate, has been seen—if, indeed, not merely a dramatic version of the 'ripping shot' mentioned in another letter of about this date:

My dearest Auntie,—You wrote me such a delightful letter and I loved every word of it. Thanks so much also for the Cream and Coffee—A.1.—only in this heat it won't keep! If I may suggest so—Condensed Milk is better—but I loved the Coffee and have writted to M: for more. I am keeping them fairly at it at Hornton Street—what? They seem to be mad about my letters: I can only say that I love every word from them and from you too. Write again if you can spare the time—You have no idea how cheery it is to get your letters from the Ration-party (food!) at 2.30 A.M. when one is feeling pretty hard-boiled! Talking of food we are feeding like—well, like you seem to have fed at Hornton St.! *I'll* tell you what *we* (another 2/Lt and self) have of an evening:

3–6 eggs apiece
Soup (sometimes)
Tea or Coffee or Chocolate
Bread & Potted Meat & Butter and Jam
Vin Ordinaire! (pinched from a ruined 'estaminet' (pub!)
Desert (Chocolate and anything we can rake up —dog biscuits etc:)

and then with very distended insides we go on our

several duties—as often as not sleeping for an hour or two—or crawling out in front among ancient Frenchmen long since deceased or shoving up barbed wire etc: Tonight I am on the last named job—I always nearly break my neck over the beastly stakes! Fritz is as quiet as a lamb today—a simile one cannot often employ when speaking of him! I hit a fellow yesterday 'somewhere in France'—in other words he will find it very painful to sit down for a while! It was a ripping shot—I used a French Rifle which I am going to try and bring back with me. I have some unexploded shells too—but can see No: 7 going to 'kingdom come' when one day Daddy strikes a match on one—so I think I had better leave them alone here! It is such a magnificient evening here—not a *sound*—but the birds singing like mad—only now and then a shot rings out to waken one up and a trench-mortar gets to work—last named very loud and noisy, but not v: useful, like *some* masters I used to know at Eton!

Straight behind us is 'Wipers,' and every 5 mins. to the tick a great 'Uncle Sam' comes whistling over and makes the town more of a scrap-heap than ever: the pity of it! It gives the lie to Kipling's topping lines which I will put down simply because I love them like everything else of his:

'I do not *like* my Empire's foes nor call 'em *angels*—still
What *is* the use of 'ating those whom you are paid to kill!'

Well—I could talk rot for pages about the life out here, and some day I will let myself out on paper about it. But for 'sensation!—sport!—sport for sport's sake'—do you remember Raffles at those lines in the play—3rd Act?—that's what one feels when crawling

about at night. Every minute one is living is a year—certainly I have learned more in 2 months than 20 years!

So long—you are a brick to write.
All food mighty acceptable!!
Love to George if you see him.

Ever your affec: nephew,

OSCAR.

P.S. The Gas has slain the strawberries—I fear.

(42)

June 15, '15. 6 P.M.

. . . All your news so interesting—esp. of Eton—ripping you're going down there from *my* point of view—I hope you saw all the old haunts—library and all—they have a very big place in my heart here—and I try and liken *this* game to the old House 'Ties'—only the odds aren't so against us here and we've more to back us up! I wrote to Tutor—did he tell you? I want to know *all* news about Eton. . . .

Another quiet day here and another still more beautiful evening. Really it is very hard to realise that anything is doing—the country looks wonderfully pretty in spite of its ugly spots. The ruins of farms scattered over the place look quite picturesque.

We had a few swells round the trench last night and they complimented the Essex on our work—oh! we are 'some boys'!

(43)

6.30 P.M. June 16, '15.

MY DEAREST MUMMY,—What an evening! the most perfect sunset I have ever seen—and de la Mare has

just had a parcel of food—so what with eggs etc: we shall have a fine meal tonight!

This morning at 2 A.M. there was a big attack further south [1]—we don't know result yet but believe we took 3 lines of trenches. We witnessed the *whole* fight from here—at least the *artillery* part of it, since we are on a raised piece of ground.

You never saw such a sight as just now—6 aeroplanes (all English and French) up at once and one German—poor old Fritz! However he got away alright.

Another quiet day on our part of the line. It is getting quite like a rest-cure in our booby-hutch—nothing but food and slopping up and down our own little section of trench—very little sleep though. Sleep is apt to be disturbed so rudely at all hrs. of the day!

No letters this morning—but no doubt will hear from one of you tomorrow.

Much love.

Ever yr own loving
OSCAR.

(44)

Thursday, 17th June.

. . . de la Mare and I are both living like kings on all this food. . . . We are now about to have a gigantic meal before the night's work—not much *work* for us officers, but having to keep awake is the nuisance—and I find it almost impossible to sleep very well in the day. However we're none the worse for living like this!

On Saturday we go back to billets, where we remain for 4 days, then back here for 10 days or so more; they are working us very hard—heaven knows why—I suppose because we are so good at it!

[1] Hooge, apparently.

(45)

Saturday, 8.30 P.M. June 19th,'15.

. . . You will be interested to hear I have been 'slightly wounded'—a mere touch under the ear[1] which made me leave the trenches early this morning for the Dressing Station—just to take the necessary precautions, which are *compulsory*, against poisoning.

Yesterday the C.O. wanted a bombing-party to go out from B Coy to see what it could do. I had *bagged* that job weeks ago—and have been reconnoitring in front of our lines all this past week with a view to a 'scrap' some night. So last night I got a party—2 N.C.O's and 1 man armed with Hand-grenades and myself with some of the *new Hand-bombs* —glorious things, *just* the size *and* weight of a *Cricket Ball!* Then at 12.30 this morning we got over the parapet and sailed over the intervening 200 yards. Of course I had planned the whole direction and spot to aim at etc: so we got up to 70 yards of the old Bosches without difficulty—going in single file—myself at the head . . . and lying out in the long grass we could distinctly hear Fritz breathing hard over his spade-work—they were digging. I had previously arranged with de la Mare that he should send a series of *flares* up to show me where exactly I was and so beat the Bosch at his own dirty game. The difficult part lay in getting within 20 yards of them—for the hand-grenades are difficult to hurl much further with any accuracy. As a matter of fact I could have got much closer up to their trench, if I hadn't been so anxious about the men with me—I would have done the whole job alone only the officer *has* to have 2 men and 1 N.C.O. with him on these occasions. If we had tried

[1] Not his last escape. A few days later: 'A bit of a "Little Willie" came in and struck my plate while we were having lunch.'

to get any nearer than the spot which I eventually chose one of them would have given the show away I am sure.

At any rate we waited for a few minutes whilst more flares went up, and then after gauging the distance I led off with cricket-ball No. I—it was just like 'throwing in' from 'cover' (a fast long hop!)—only this time I had 'some' batsmen to run out and there was a price on those stumps! I fancy 'things happened' in their trench—as there were howls—and a bit of lyddite flew back and hit me just under the ear—mere scratch—only it spoilt my old coat for ever and ever—amen! The others then stood up and 'threw in'—the wicket-keep put them down nicely—and we made haste back to the Pavilion!—it *was* a case of 'appealing against the light'—for it was 1.30 A.M. by then and getting uncomfortably light. 'Fritz' seemed so scared that he never fired a shot—only sent up a brace of flares—during which we lay down flat in the long grass. When I got back Monypenny said I must go and have the scratch painted with Iodine and that sort of rot—so I went off with Crump (who—remember—is stretcher-bearer) to show me the way back to the dressing-station at the Canal. We just got there before dawn. I then 'took car' (don't cher know!) to a place 2 miles back where I went to the Field Ambulance and had a sleep—then had the thing seen to and an injection v. Poison put into me—then to our *billets* by Red Cross Car, as the Battalion comes back tonight and they said it was not worth coming all the way back. So here I am—alone in our little farm house again—and am off to sleep in the barn as usual! The Battalion won't arrive until early morning probably—so I haven't done badly!

I had a little jaunt with a R. Cross Captain in his ambulance Car and got some money from the Field Cashier, had a shave and shampoo and two excellent

meals—in which we had STRAWBERRIES !—in the town close by here.

At first I was jolly sick at having to come back, but it has really been rather a 'jaunt,' starting with our escapade in the early hours—for all the world like those early rises up at Masongill—crawling after Rabbits : these were 'some' rabbits' !

Well—am dead tired—so good night.

I knew you would like a description of this sort of thing—but remember that it is an every night occurrence—this bombing—and jolly sight nicer than sitting helplessly being shelled by invisible guns. It is the *only relic* of the old fighting left in this war—this bombing—none of your gas or shells—but just like our troops did at Badajoz etc : in the old wars—top-hole. . . .

(47)

Sunday, June 20th, '15. 8 P.M.

MY DEAREST MUMMY,—Thanks so much for your 2 lovely letters. The P.C. I got last night—No : I letter this morning and No : II just now ! I am in the height of happiness, for I have had such a glorious lot of letters and parcels since I came here yesterday. Last night the fruits from G.M. and a parcel from Barkers via Daddy and your letter and a *very* nice one from Mr. Bryers with a 7d novel—and tonight your letter—a *very* cheery one from D—and a *de*lightful one from de Havilland—one that makes me thrill with the old zest for the House I used to feel in those immortal House-matches and all the other things which you know I held dear at Eton—also 3 parcels of food !—more from D—more from you (?)—and still *more* from D with the Army & Navy Canteen thing ! ! ! The whole mess-table is now rocking with my things ! !

Oh ! Mummy, what a glorious time I am having ! I mean all these letters and parcels from you and D, the former so cheery and encouraging—and the very life itself—in the thick of it, and *yet* at Stone House, Eton, Masongill and, always, No: 7. Through every one of these places I have been time and again and yet with my feet on Belgian soil and my eyes bunged up with sleep ! Never has my imagination stood me in such stead—you will laugh, but all the same you will understand. What *does* it matter where one is and how one is so long as one has these pictures behind one—I *am* beginning to see the falseness of materialism—One can be in a French trench and yet at Masongill with the greatest ease—I can, thank heaven.

Well—our little dinner is on the table in the garden and it is getting dark—a beautiful evening. I have been strolling round the fields with my mind concentrated on Masongill—that is the greatest rest one gets here from the trenches—*Freedom* for absent-mindedness—which of course it is ! ! I presume you have had my long letter to D forwarded on to you—that has all my news.

A kiss to G.M.—and a big one !

Ever yr own loving and very—very happy son—OSCAR.

I bought this little 'souvenir' in the town here yesterday and one for G.M.

Not a word about the bombing to his mother, who was away from home, and not to be alarmed if Oscar could help it. At Masongill, moreover, she was in his oldest and very dearest haunts; and in billets he had time to join her there in spirit

as he describes. The trenches may well have seemed the farther cry, that summer Sunday evening in the farm-house garden, with the 'glorious lot of letters and parcels' hot from home. Yet his bombing adventure was on his mind; he feared he had made too much of it, and he now went vigorously to the other extreme, incidentally assuring me that he was 'as timorous as a cat,' and closing the subject in a characteristic letter to us both.

(60)

June 29th, '15. 7.30 P.M.

MY DEAREST MUMMY & DADDY,—I gather that by the time this reaches you [you] will both be at No: 7 again. I got Land & Water and a letter from Masongill today.—Now *don't* get excited at what I described to you the other day—those little parties for bomb-throwing are constantly sent out by every Company—there is not an officer practically here who hasn't been out on one. I must have given you to understand that it was an exceptional enterprise. Not a bit of it—it was a jolly interesting one for the first time over—but as regards danger I may as well say that there is much more of that to be met with every day that we are shelled to any extent than there is in going up, so to speak, to a man's front door bell—pulling it—and running off again—as we used to do in Pitt St: ! I want you to realize that the 'nearer you are to the enemy here the safer it is'—this sounds paradoxical —but anyone will tell you that it's true. I don't give you long descriptions of being under shell-fire, but believe me I would rather *live* 20 yards in the open

in front of the Bosches than experience such a bombardment, say, as we had on the 24th May. This bombing lends itself to picturesque descriptions and all that, but it is merely the thrill of being, as you say, on another man's doorstep which counts. If the risk were any greater than sitting in the trench with bullets flying round you can be sure we should never be allowed to go out at all—as the C.O. wants every officer he has got —and the *effect* on the Germans of these local scraps is merely a moral one—makes them more careful and shows them that we still have our initiative—so much talked of. Very seldom do we actually attempt to destroy a certain position—machine-gun emplacement for instance—as the artillery (when they're awake) do that for us. Well, enough for that—but please bear in mind that I'm *jolly* careful about myself—recklessness is not encouraged out here, and a fellow is merely considered a fool, as fool he jolly well is, if he doesn't keep himself safe for his job, which—after all is said and done—is not to provide a shooting range but to look after his men. Amen! Here endeth the *first* lesson!

Nothing doing today—a good deal of artillery activity though—my word these Bosches do waste their shells—I really don't think they intend in Germany to carry this war on another winter—esp: when they are on such an excellent footing for diplomatic moves as now—with Russia well fenced in derrière Lemberg—but will we let 'em come to any terms whatever—that's the question—I don't think we shall ever be such *dolts*—do you? This morning I was just going to have a shave and brush-up when Jones appeared and Gen: Anley a little later—not much to say—the former—and when the Tin-hat came to view I slid down a communication trench—not *my* place among the High and Almighty! Since then

I have had my spring cleaning and a good look at the front line trenches with those very excellent glasses of Uncle C's. It's funny the way they start shelling here. All is quiet — then suddenly some wretched little spit-fire sends a few 'Very little Willies' over their trenches. A few mins: elapse then come some Hairy Maries—intended for the officious little offender —which generally plop round the reserve trenches sending up a 'bush' of black acrid smoke. Then the wily dogs send in a few 'Whiz-bangs' (so called since they burst before they even seem to leave the muzzle) which make our fellows wild—then the Germans get properly into their stride and—boom-boom-splosh-splosh is the order of the next few moments — being answered by our fellows with sickening little shrapnels which would hardly knock a sandbag over— You will see from this that Fritz has his own way here *at present* —but that is merely because we are saving our high explosive for when it is really needed—in a show.— All the same it makes one wild with rage. When we *do* get going of course 'it ain't no jam for Tommy —but it's kites and crows for him!' (and heaps of 'em too!).

Well—my anxious ones—I laid it on a bit thick in my last long effort—believe me it is possible for AOH to exaggerate!

Much love—Tinned Fruit and all your food just *the thing!* (*Watch* ready yet?)

Ever your own loving son

OSCAR.

If he would seem to have made the best of everything for our benefit, I can only say we have been shown a good many of the letters which Oscar still found time to write to others, and that practically

all are in the same strain of jovial enthusiasm, full of the same genial fire and the same spontaneous fun. The only difference is here and there a grim detail which might have shocked or harrowed us. Two examples are enough to show his tender thought for us in this respect. In the second letter there was perhaps an underlying sadness, but poor Crump's death was enough to sadden him, and was just the sort of thing that Oscar would *not* tell us before he need.

To Mr. de Havilland.

June 29, '15.

. . . It's an extraordinary mixture of humour and ghastliness this whole life—On one hand you can't go a yard along the trenches without seeing something which beats anything in peace-time for sheer humour —one of our orderly men for instance stumbling along a squelching communication trench with a couple of dozen eggs and other dainties for his officer (me !) suddenly slips and falls headlong with arms stretched wildly—well—you must be in a bad plight if that doesn't make you roar—I've seen it and heard it afterwards too ! . . . . And again the very first time I was up here I went along to see my Company officer (a 2nd Lieut like myself owing to the casualties we have had) in the front line—and found his feet—that was all—a Jack J: had done the rest. I never told this at home—but it will illustrate what I have been saying. . . .

To his Cousin Winnie.

June 28th, '15.

. . . I hear from M. and D. pretty regularly—it wouldn't be worth a week out here if I didn't! How is Prescott & Co:—not suffering from any more maladies I hope 'sincerely I hope so—I hope so sincerely!' Do you remember *that* in 'Jones of the Lancers'—priceless song! My *servant* used to sing that—and very well too—he sang it at a Concert at the place where we were billeted the other day—and two days ago was shot through the brain just outside my dug-out—poor fellow. . . . Isn't it wonderful how things happen just at the most critical time? I was annoyed with [somebody or other] for getting me up unnecessarily this morning—He was promptly shot through the shoulder and badly cut in the head by an infernal Trench-mortar.

It is time we had another scrap—this sort of 'lying in state' doesn't suit your Highness! The place has been as quiet as the grave—and yet every day a few fellows get knocked out—and as R.K. says—'There ain't no chorus here to give—nor there ain't no band to play!'

A poor letter—but will get something better off my chest one of these days—I have 'a nasty taste in my mouth,' if you know what I mean!

Love to you all—

Yours,
OSCAR.

(61)

June 29th.

Another quiet day—oh! these quiet days—how many more of them!

(62)

July 2nd, '15.

. . . remember—*we* are the 'trench diggers—builders—*and* holders,' and therefore are put onto every dirty job the authorities can find ! ! . . .

As for George—good luck to him in that benighted corner of Europe ! I will send him a line sometime. Personally I would rather be in the Line anywhere than serving the guns, but that is merely through my experience of the former, *long* as it is ! . . .

(63)

July 3, '15. 8.30 P.M.

DEAREST M. & D.,—Here we are again—in the front line this time and a bare 20 yards from the Bosches—I came up last night after dining with the R.M.C. officers at the Dressing Station—by car of course ! It was rather funny to see them bolt when the Germans sent over some large shrapnel—to catch the transports coming up the roads—my—they were 'up it' ! Of course to me this was amusing after 2 solid months of much closer stuff than that ! Well—this is the old trench into which I brought my platoon on the 24th when we came up to support D Company. They have improved it some—but the Bosches have sapped right up, as I say, to within 20 yards—rather less—and we shall have to chuck them a few chocolates, I'm thinking !

To-night we go out hay-making—in other words the Division want us to cut all the grass in front of our lines—they are sending *scythes* up for the purpose ! Doubtless this is to prevent Fritz from doing 'creepy crawlums' up to our sandbags ! We are getting quite intimate with him now—eh ?

Got Punch and letter-card *and* provisions (from you and Winnie)—so am well-set up !

So glad the lace arrived! No—I bought it in a town near our billets—4 miles from —— Good heavens! —— is deserted now—what do you think? ?

Much love—am writing in the dark. 'You should never write home in the dark!'

Ever yr. own loving

OSCAR.

Such a nice letter from Auntie.

His letters came usually by the last post of the day, and continually by twos and threes—'in close formation,' as he complained when we told him, whereas he posted them 'in open order.' During the war that last post has become very late in our part, no doubt by reason of this very mail from the front; and many a night last summer would I go downstairs again to wait, even at the open door, even without shame in the middle of the road, till the postman's lantern glimmered in our darkened street. On the night of July 7, he was later than ever, but that only enhanced the eventual joy of two of Oscar's best and brightest—written with all the splendid confidence the war was giving him—even in a hand never so firm or so decided as in the trenches under fire!

(64)

July 4th,'15. 8 P.M.

MY DEAREST MUMMY & DADDY,—A stewing hot day and my booby infested by flies! Last night I had a very full bag in letters—two from you and several

others ! I was so glad to have the sermon—you know how much I appreciate it.

The Pastie also arrived, and I spent the dull hour or two between 12 A.M. and 'stand to' in eating it hard ! I have finished the whole 2 boxes already ! I am so glad the lace arrived safely—I heard from G.M. too—thanking me for it. I wrote to Mrs. W. days ago !

Nothing doing today—there was to have been a bombardment by our guns this evening—but it seems to have been a wash-out ! Last evening we got hold of some rifle-grenades—explosive bombs which you shoot out from the rifle—and I plumped several beauties among the Bosches—they had been doing the dirty on us all day so we showed them we weren't exactly asleep ! You fire these missiles off from the trench of course.

There is a ruined Estaminet (beer-house) between my fire-trench and communication trench, and they keep up a rapid fire on this all through the night to stop any of our little games—for a ruined building in the front line is a dangerous thing to the opposing party !

Old man Clarke has just rolled in with a list of available men for tonight's working. Wire, bombing party etc :—We are going to give them a few Crème de Menthes early tomorrow morning—just to stop them working. You never heard such a row as Fritz makes opposite us of an evening ! Sawing wood and riveting bolts and goodness knows what else besides. He has some game up his sleeve—mark you, he has sapped up to within 20 yards of us—so one has to be canny !

I've got some more verses to send you very soon—so brace yourself up for the shock !

Must cease fire now—

Ever yr own loving

OSCAR.

(65)

July 5, '15. 5 P.M.

MY DEAREST MUMMY & DADDY,—Got your cheery letter last night—They sort the letters earlier now—before midnight. These 'close order' letters are rather absurd—but it is something to do with the trains catching the mail—or rather vice versa! You'll have to just take them en masse!

Well—rather amusing this morning—the Bosches suddenly sent over an extraordinary object—a *sort* of aerial torpedo—which no doubt you know of. This they fired from just behind their front line only 200 yards off at most—aiming for the Estaminet which our line (my platoon) circles round. The thing came trundling through the air—you could actually see it rolling over and over—rolly-poly we call it! There were shouts and the men fled from where they could guess it would drop—then the thing dropped—and Jack J's weren't in it for explosion! They sent 3 of these things over and it was really rather funny—seeing a great sausage lolloping through the air—it takes about 5 mins. to land!

We got the artillery onto them and have had no more trouble since.

We had quite a merry evening last night: there was an attack on further south and the dickins of a noise, and we pumped over some rifle grenades just to show there was no ill-feeling up our way—also I took out a brace of my N.C.O's and attempted to give them some more to digest. As luck would have it both my efforts were 'duds'—In other words they refused to explode—the other three grenades I couldn't get the pin out of for firing—so I got beastly wet—lost a handkerchief and my temper for nothing—It's an easy job here, as we are so near them, and as I told you before Fritz is much too busy at his game behind the barricade he has had the unbounded cheek to erect so near our lines,

to notice our little wanderings.—It is this 'little game' of his that we want to discover and to put an end to —because we have an idea that he is attempting to blow the Estaminet up and, incidentally, us with it! However—'ne craignez pas—pour nous partons demain!' Twiggez-vous?

Old Clarke was at his best this morning when they sent the sausage over—The first landed just over his (and as it happened mine) booby—and out he came like a shot rabbit—his language—oh! 'priceless' isn't the word!

He then lay out (in the most exposed part of the trench) and drawled—'Fritz can do what he jolly well likes etc: etc:!'

His sarcasm is really worthy of some of my Eton friends! He said that they kept our guns in a glass case—he was dead on our guns—and well he might be, considering that they never do a jolly thing up this way. If they do wake up they unfailingly drop 1 in 6 into *our* front line or just in front in their fatherly way —I love to hear the remarks passed on them—I endorse them all fully myself! Clarke's remark that they gave us 'O-hello' this morning was rather nice! Some of the officers of a Territorial Division just come up here spent the night with us, in order to acquaint themselves with the trench and its many vicissitudes! They will be relieving us probably tomorrow—and it *is* possible that we shall go back altogether for a week or more to reorganize. We shall go behind—a good way back somewhere and generally collect ourselves, for we want collecting. This is only a possibility though at present.

About Crump—he was shot dead outside my booby —just when another death we know of occurred—so I didn't mention it in my letter—it wasn't at all necessary. . . . He was a brave fellow. . . .

As for casualties—there have been *very* few in our Coy: none in my platoon since the above—over a week ago now. These flies are the *limit*—there's old Clarke at it again. He's wildly excited because our chaps have shut up one of their most officious batteries on our right with a brace of heavy explosives—'There'll be a Court of Inquiry on that,' says Clarke!

It is a fairly placid evening—a little shelling by the Bosches—but nowhere near our line—we are too near their own crowd to be shelled very frequently—only when they have the exact range.

My men are cleaning their rifles and there is one of our aeroplanes doing good business overhead—a little sniping—not much. I think it is time I sent over a few more rifle-grenades—We've got a machine that puts them in accurately to a yard and they do a lot of damage. It will stay quiet until about 8 P.M. when there will be 'wind up' for 2 hours—heavy rifle fire on both sides—then fairly quiet for rest of night unless we drop bombs on them like we did last night. Then Fritz gets in such a funk that he shoots off wildly in *all* directions except the right one! I must agree with him—it *is* a nasty thing to be bombarded by an unseen and unlocated enemy in the shape of me or one of my men. We only gave them 3 last night though—rather a wash-out.

The wily dogs spotted a stack of rubbish-straw etc: in the Estaminet last evening and sent across *flares* to set it on fire. They succeeded in doing so, but we[1] put earth and water on it before daylight today: so again it was Checkmate to Fritz—The 'Jocks' took a section of their opposing trenches yesterday—I wish we could rush these ugly sandbags in front of us—but I fear there is no such luck.

[1] It is said that Oscar showed the way, and that the task was more ticklish than he suggests.

—— is a funny card—he comes tearing down here with drops of perspiration streaming off his long nose, speaking at a terrific rate and expecting you to take it all down verbatim—then whisks off again.—de la Mare comes across him more than I of course—The rest of my conversation with Clarke was strictly 'business' just now!

Much love—

Yr loving son

OSCAR.

N.B. I had a letter from Crump's father in answer to mine—for of course I wrote about him—I think it bucked them up 'some' to hear from me.

O.

If some of the letters are more letter-like than these, surely none are more like the boy himself! It was Oscar talking to us from his trench, talking harder than ever while there was time, telling us all manner of things in each eager breath! And I was to have talked back next night; there were one or two things I was looking forward to telling him. First, how his nine-and-a-half-months-old Commission had only just arrived in all its documentary glory; and how it began with the King's greeting, 'To our Trusty and well beloved Arthur Oscar Hornung'!

Then I had to tell him how I had just been to tea in the room where 'Vanity Fair' was written,

after pointing out the house to people for twenty years, as one that I never expected to have the joy of entering. It was a last joy. Within the hour came the telegram to say that Oscar had been killed in action on July 6.

III

The details when they came were scanty but enough. That early morning, the Brigade on their left being engaged in a small local attack, the Essex standing to arms had been bombarded by the enemy's light artillery. Oscar was threading his way behind his men, all anxiety on their account, and had just asked Sergeant Clarke: 'Is everybody all right?' At that moment a small high-explosive just cleared the parapet, but not the opposite edge of the narrow trench, bursting close behind Oscar's head: he died where he fell unconscious, and was buried that night by a party of the men he loved.

It is not for us to add one word of our own; but with a very few of the wonderful tributes from others, we shall leave our dear son to rest in the hearts of many loving friends.

Said the *Eton Chronicle*, in an obituary notice already quoted on the opening page:

Oscar Hornung came from Mr. Churchill's at Stone House in September 1908 to Mr. H. de Havilland, and after six years left last July to go to Cambridge. His inherited love of literature made him an eager reader of books at all times. A Division Master recognised this one year when he gave him a special prize for English work. A good cross-country runner he was second in Junior and third in Senior Steeplechases. At football he played a hard game, and his energy as Captain of Games was notorious. A few days after leaving Eton, thinking that the best chance to get to the front was in a reserve regiment, he joined the 3rd Essex. At Harwich he lived until April in a farm-house on the marsh next the sea, and in April he went with his enthusiasm to France. Among other exploits he one night leading three others crept 200 yards to the barbed wire until they could hear the diggers, and then after a successful bomb throwing came back with his ear badly injured. On July 6th when behind the parapet he was struck by a shell and died in the trench without recovering consciousness.

A letter from a General Officer says: 'His platoon were wild with grief, as they worshipped him. The men said he was absolutely fearless and was employed on all sorts of jobs, machine guns, bombs, patrols, etc.' Any one who knew him will recognise the boy at Eton. He revelled in every hour of his life at the FRONT just as he had in life in general. 'He lies buried in a cemetery made by the Essex Regiment behind a farm which goes by the name of Turco Farm on the east side of the Yser Canal.'

A simple-minded and religious boy he lived the straightest of lives, always at the top of some enthusiasm whether playing games or fighting Germans. His affection for the School at all times was intense and he wrote that Eton meant more than ever to him out

there; every letter to the last showed the same spirit. Full of thought for others he was loved by all who knew him.

Comment, again, is hardly for us, who like to feel that this generous writer and friend did think of Oscar as a member of his house up to the outbreak of war; in spirit he was a most loyal member to the last; but he had actually left Eton at Easter, in order to read for King's, the college of his own unhesitating choice, where the following October was to have found him installed. He had done his Little-go, finished for ever with uncongenial subjects; had only History, Literature, and Life before him!

From Eton came other tributes, which should speak for themselves if space permitted, and two that must. One was the beautiful letter from Peter Blacker, Captain of the House most of the two years Oscar was Captain of Games. All of it I cannot bring myself to give, but this much will show the noble comfort given, while conveying some idea of Oscar's Eton life:

. . . As you know, Oscar went to Eton two halves before me. During my first two or three weeks there, I suffered from a hideous form of homesickness that must have made me appear a very unattractive person to everyone. The first time I saw Oscar was my second

evening, when he came into my room and talked to me as one schoolboy talks to another, telling me what to do, and explaining the somewhat complicated conventions of Eton, and in his jolly way giving me a few words of encouragement which meant the world to me then, and for which I have ever since been grateful. But it was only some 2 years later that I got to know him intimately, and began to appreciate those fine qualities that have subsequently meant such a lot to the House.

I saw that irrepressible and effervescing flow of energy, which appeared in everything he did, governed throughout by the highest principles, and directed by an indomitable moral and physical courage.

While a lower boy, and during his first year as an Upper, his uncompromising devotion to what he considered Right sometimes brought him into conflict with environing—and at that time contrary—influences, and caused him to lead a somewhat isolated life, so that it was only when he reached a real position of eminence in the house, some 3 years ago, that his influence was given full play. And immediately others began to fall in behind him, and follow his lead.

I tell you this with the strictest truth, that during the last 2 years of his Eton career, when I was thrown into close contact with him, and came to know him well, I never heard him say an unjustifiably harsh or unkind word to anyone.

Always ready to see another's good points in preference to his bad ones; always scrupulously careful never to express an uncharitable thought about anyone; always the first to own himself in the wrong should he feel that he had acted mistakenly; always straightforward and loyal; always sympathetic, unselfish and kind, he was always loved and admired by everyone who knew him.

I can tell you with perfect frankness that during the whole time that I have known Oscar I do not once remember him failing in any of these qualities in the smallest degree without having recognized the failure immediately and without making immediate reparation, all personal considerations laid aside.

What he has been able to do for the House in this way neither Mr. de Havilland nor I can ever make you understand.

I feel that in Oscar I have lost that most valuable and treasured of possessions;—a friend upon whom one might count and depend, and whom one could trust. I can pay no higher tribute to him than this.

Our hearts go out to this dear fellow, now fighting gallantly in his turn, and already a far heavier loser by the war than when he wrote this noble letter. We can only thank him with our prayers.

A younger friend of Oscar's, the friend of many happy holidays, wrote to show us what he was away from home and from school:

I am just sending you a line, to tell you how we all loved Oscar, and how deeply we feel for you. All who got to know him well, discovered what a beautiful character he had, and all loved him. I have never met, nor do I expect I ever shall meet, a person with such a noble heart, and so unselfish. He never said or did anything unkind to or about anyone.

From the front his friend and company commander, Guy de la Mare, wrote of him as 'a terrible loss to the company,' and as one who 'knew no

fear at all.' The last letter shall be Sergeant-Major Clarke's—for Oscar's affectionate belief in his platoon sergeant was very soon to be justified by 'old man Clarke's' further promotion. How glad the boy would have been! How touched and how embarrassed by this:

I must say, Sir, your dear son died like a Gentleman and a Soldier. He was always to the front and a braver man there never was, his thoughts were always for the men under him and to their comfort he was always seeing. And there was no one more sorry to lose him than his platoon and myself. He was a promising officer and if he had continued in the service he would have had a fine career before him. On several occasions he himself organised bomb throwing parties and proceeded within a few yards of the German trenches, and I know on a couple of occasions he must have done considerable damage and confused them as they were rather quiet afterwards for some time.

I might mention, Sir, that your brave son lies in a quiet spot beside more of his comrades on the famous battlefield of Ypres. I served all through the South African War, but was never in such a place as that, and I am not sorry to say, Sir, that I have left that place for another along the line.

The whole battalion left that place the day after Oscar's death; he told us they were going to, but it was God's Will that he should stay behind. But if against our enemies there is one hand still lifted that we long to grasp, one elbow to which we wish more power, they are those of the gallant

Sergeant-Major, who was our dear boy's guide and friend in the day of battle, and in the hour of death.

'Trusty and well beloved' were the words that reached us almost in that hour; and almost in the next came a gracious human message from the King and Queen themselves, even as it were in tender confirmation of the stately phrase. And yet, could words apply more closely to all our glorious boys—above all to Oscar's 'one class who are enjoying themselves in this war'? In any other country, by one means or the other, the men were to be had: it is only our Public Schools which could have furnished at once an army of natural officers, trained to lead, old in responsibility, and afraid of nothing in the world but fear itself. Their teaching will not be forgotten by those of us whose strange fate it is to inherit our sons' great names, to follow humbly in the steps we thought to guide. We shall remember that each was also the son of some great school which shares our sorrow and our pride, and which perhaps did more than we ourselves to make him what he was.

Besides Oscar, I am thinking of two who were here to mourn him last July. Robin Blacker was his old friend's brilliant young brother—so young

that he had once been Oscar's fag. He had left Eton long before his time, yet full of Eton honours. He might have been First Keeper of the Field this very half: he preferred to play for England, and, in the Guards' great hour at Loos, fell most gloriously, thirty yards ahead of his platoon, with none between him and his last goal.

In the same hour and the same attack John Kipling was last seen alive. He was even younger than Robin Blacker, but the gap between him and Oscar, two equally independent characters, had long been filled by the love of brothers. It is said that after Oscar fell John's scheme of war included the personal vendetta, just as one younger than any of them is already preparing 'to avenge John as he avenged Oscar.' John's lot was not to spend many weeks under shell-fire, like Oscar and his merry men; but he lived to lead a platoon of the Irish Guards in such fighting as Oscar never saw. God send that he is living still, and restore him even yet to the world our dear boys loved so well, and surrendered without a sigh!

It may be remembered that in one of those last two letters Oscar promised us more verses of his own. They came at length, among his other papers, in scribbled, experimental fragments which I have no

right to put together here, deeply moving as they are to us who can read between the sincere and simple lines. They were not directly about the war: they were about Stone House, his first school and in a sense my own, but to us both a second home. Yet they touch quite openly and naturally on Death, and on all that might come instead to hearts deepened and strengthened by the war. To Oscar it was Death that came before the lines were nearly finished; yet it is from them we know, what his happy letters never hinted, that all the time he was as ready even for that as for everything else. He thinks of old schoolfellows who have gone before him, and only asks, if die he must, to 'die as they did, by their schoolboy honour aided.' He pictures the Chapel at Stone House, where reproductions of the regimental colours of Old Boys killed in the Boer War hang like true knights' banners:

> Once again look up above
> At those flags in order hung
> To commemorate our love. . . .

'And there he stops,' said Mr. Churchill in his beautiful sermon about our boy. 'It may be the last words he ever wrote. Some day soon we shall have his flag to "commemorate our love." Our love, for one of the most fearless, one of the kindest,

one of the simplest, one of the purest boys we ever had in this school.'

And not at Stone House only is his dear name to endure, but also at Eton, for all the hundreds she has lost. Of their own generous accord, the boys of his Eton house are placing a tablet on the wall of his old room; and for the tablet his revered 'R. K.' has written out one of his own stanzas, adding, 'I like them for Oscar because of the last line':—

He scarce had need to doff his pride or slough the dross of Earth—
E'en as he trod that day to God so walked he from his birth,
In simpleness and gentleness and honour and clean mirth.

PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO. LTD., COLCHESTER
LONDON AND ETON